

Borne the Battle

Episode # 138

Sean Ricks – Navy Veteran, CEO of Ricks Roasters Coffee Company

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(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music:

[00:00:10] Opening Monologue:

Tanner Iskra (TI): Let's get it. April 3, 2019. Borne the Battle, brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am your host, Marine Corps veteran, Tanner Iskra. So, if you're hearing this on the day that it dropped, it is the day of my birth, and I am probably not at work. I am probably sleeping in or enjoying a frosty beverage. So, last episode we set a goal and we got 30 ratings and 14 reviews so far. Little bit to go, but I do appreciate those that took the time. But I do appreciate those that took the time and rated it and reviewed the show, and, also, at 100- when we get to 100 ratings, I will release Adrian Cronauer of Good Morning Vietnam fame interviewing Mel Brooks. Adrian Cronauer interviewed Mel Brooks for another piece of content that the VA was going to release, and, that didn't happen. However, the interview did happen, and it is in my lap, and it is hilarious. In it, uh, Adrian Cronauer is interviewing Mel Brooks about his service, about his time with the USO and it's a hilarious piece of content and I can't wait to share it with you. Uhm, after we get the 100 reviews. As soon as that happens, this interview will be yours. No news releases of note this week. So, you won't have to- you won't be hearing that transition. I'm probably gonna revamp that one. Uhm, due to some feedback. So, you probably won't hear the same one from the previous episode ever again. And, you're welcome. However, VET TEC is still looking for training partners. They have over 15 million dollars to spend. VET TEC is a new, 5-year pilot program that trains veterans in the skills needed by employers in the high-tech sector. VA is looking for training providers to train veterans in computer software, information science, media application, data processing and computer programming. VA pays program costs to the provider. The veteran is charged nothing, and veterans can receive a housing stipend while in the program. Similar to the GI Bill. Applications for the first year are open now for training

providers. You can apply right now to serve veterans. To participate, your facility must have been in operation for at least two years and have successfully provided your high tech program for at least one year. Veterans need one day, that's just one day, of GI Bill entitlement to apply. And the training doesn't count against your entitlement. So, the training doesn't count against your GI Bill. This is a separate pot of money. For more information, go to the GI Bill website at www.benefits.va.gov/gibill that's www.benefits.va.gov/gibill and look for VET TEC at the top of the page.

So, today's guest is a Navy veteran and entrepreneur. He started a coffee business out of his house and now does 40,000 pounds of coffee a year. I found him when I took the train my first day at the VA. I was taking the, uh, Virginia Railway Express on Quantico, it was early in the morning and I was not awake. I'm not a morning person, and, I took a sip of this coffee at this coffee stand, and I was like, holy cow, this is good stuff. And, I took a look and it was an independent coffee bean- it was an independent coffee roaster out of Fredericksburg, said it was a veteran-owned business, so I kept that in mind for a time like this where I could highlight a veteran-owned business, and they're just rocking and rolling. So, without further ado, I bring to you, Mr. Sean Ricks.

[00:03:57] Music

[00:04:03] Interview:

(TI): So, the first time I- I looked at Ricks Roasters, I thought immediately that it had to be a guy with his first name, Rick

Sean Ricks (SR): [Laughter]

(TI): And—

(SR): Get that all the time.

(TI): I wondered if you got that all the time.

(SR): Yeah.

(TI): Uhm—

(SR): I used to get it before I owned the company, and then once we started the company, there was no getting away from it. Like, uhm, it- and I really felt bad for other males that work for our company—

(TI): Sure.

(SR): Because everybody assumed they were Rick, right? Like, you see a male, and you go, “Oh, you must be Rick.” No, there’s no Rick and I’m not even Ricks [Laughter]. Uhm—

(TI): That’s hilarious.

(SR): We actually thought about, uhm, for the farmer’s market season one year, getting t-shirts made that said on the front, “There is No Rick”.

(TI): [Laughter] That’s awesome. So, how did the idea for a coffee- coffee business come about?

(SR): Uhm, so it really started, uh, kind of as a winery. So—

(TI): Really?

(SR): So, the backstory is, uhm, so Keely is a social worker.

(TI): Keely- and is Keely- Keely’s your wife?

(SR): Yeah. Keely, my wife, is a social worker.

(TI): Okay, got you.

(SR): And, uhm, you know, I was an intel officer, so, our joke always was that she was trying to save the world, and I was trying to kill it. And at the time, she was- she managed, uhm, a grant for the school system called the [inaudible] Grant. It’s a grant for homeless children.

(TI): Okay.

(SR): Uhm, we would get into all these, you know, discussions about what the best way to deal with the homelessness problem was and da da da. And, uhm, you know, it was really a public versus a private solution conversation that we always got into. So, at some point, I was like, you know, I- I think it’s a private solution, I should probably put my money where my mouth is, so, I started working with a homeless outreach in Woodbridge called Street Light, it’s uh, Street Light Community Outreach.

(TI): Okay.

(SR): And, I was doing the job readiness stuff for them, and it was really rewarding and at the time, Keely and I were making like wine and beer and stuff at home, and I'm like, wouldn't it be cool to have a vineyard that was a homeless outreach, where they could come and live there and learn a skill and-

(TI): Interesting.

(SR): Get therapy from her and all this. So, we had this great idea that we're gonna do this homeless outreach vineyard. Uhm, but vineyards are expensive, so we were gonna start doing a alcohol- kind of on a small scale, running the business out of our house. Well, you pretty much can't do that. ABC says, "No".

(TI): Got you.

(SR): Uhm, they frown on people making alcohol.

(TI): Noted.

(SR): So, it just would've been too hard. So, we take- we sort of shelved the idea. And a year later, we really still wanted to do something together, uhm, something that we could give back and help people.

(TI): What year was this?

(SR): So, the winery thing was 2012, so 2013 was the following year.

(TI): Got you.

(SR): And there was this coffee that I used to love in Singapore. We're big coffee drinkers, and- and there was this Indonesian coffee that I used to drink when I lived in Singapore. And I was like, why don't we just buy that coffee, bring it here, and sell it? And like, let that be our thing. So, we couldn't find it. So, I was like, well it can't be that hard to roast coffee, uhm, so, we started roasting in a little room off our kitchen with this little mini roaster. Uhm, and it just sort of exploded from there. And we actually already had- we'd set up the LLC for the winery, so we were actually a DBA for the first few months that we, uhm, that we were going. But I mean, from- and Keely made me write this down so I wouldn't forget the dates. But like, the idea popped into our head on a Thursday, by Sunday we had a website, we had a roaster on the way, we had green coffee on the way, and we sold our first pound of coffee the following Thursday.

(TI): Oh my gosh. Within a week.

(SR): To a friend of mine at the Pentagon. Uhm, because that was the other thing. I was sitting in a cubicle at the Pentagon, shoving pencils in my eyes, and I was like, I got to do something- something could not leave my mind.

(TI): I- I can sympathize with that life.

(SR): Yeah.

(TI): I was up there from, let's see, '09 to '11.

(SR): Oh, yeah. And so, I left in '11- or no, got there in '11, sorry.

(TI): We talked about that. We just missed each other.

(SR): Just missed each other, yep. So, it- you know, really did start kind of as- as a hobby. So, we started off, uhm, with this little bitty farmer's market in Stafford, and kind of the next jump was what's now called the Long Family Market in North Stafford—

(TI): Mm.

(SR): Then was just the North Stafford farmer's market opened, and it just exploded. Like, we, uh, we worked all our waking hours preparing for that market. Uhm, the week before, and, literally sold out in an hour.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SR): Yeah. It- it was nuts. So, then it, uh, so we kind of- we picked up some wholesale accounts that way, we really started kind of growing quickly then. Uhm, and got our commercial roaster in August of that year. So, we started in mid-May 2013, uhm, that farmer's market started June 1, and we had our commercial roaster- our 33 pound per batch roaster in the house by August.

(TI): Oh my gosh. Wow.

(SR): And we, uh, so one of our friends- we never intended to have a coffee shop. Like we- we were gonna be wholesale the whole time. That was our- that was our plan. And, a friend of ours emailed that he'd seen that the VRE contract at Quantico was coming up.

(TI): That's the first time I saw your coffee. It was my first day coming up to the- coming up to the Department of Veterans Affairs and I was taking

the VRE and I- it was 5 in the morning and I didn't really care what coffee was in my mouth at that point, I wasn't even really awake but I- I took a sip of your coffee and I was like "Oh my god, what is this?" And, it was so good. And I looked at your- the packaging, and I was like, oh, Ricks Roasters, it had some Celtic stuff on there, I was like, "Cool, cool, design." And then it said veteran-owned, and I was like, okay, noted. So, yeah- so when I, you know, when I got this podcast, I was like that's one of the first ones I'm gonna be interviewing.

(SR): Yeah. Uhm, so—

(TI): So, it was the VRE.

(SR): So, the plan was, you know, you'll hear that recurring theme- the plan was. The lady that managed the shop for the outgoing contractor- so she was this lady named Mary Junkersfeld. She was gonna run it for us, we were gonna partner up with a restaurant that's no longer in business that was across the street called Harry O's—

(TI): Oh, I remember Harry O's.

(SR): You remember Harry O's?

(TI): Yeah.

(SR): Okay, so, uhm, it was gonna be us, Freddy that owned Harry O's, and Mary were gonna be the three of us together, we were gonna be the name, handle all the administrative part, and supply the coffee, and stuff like that, and then Mary and Freddy. And it actually worked really, really well. We, uhm, you know, we got the contract, and everything was actually going pretty well. It was getting busier and busier, things were going great, and then, uhm, Mary actually had a heart attack in the parking lot, one day.

(TI): Oh my gosh.

(SR): Yeah, she was only 50 something. Uhm, and that—

(TI): Passed away?

(SR): Yeah, she died. Yeah.

(TI): Oh my god.

(SR): Yeah, she died on the spot, right there in the parking lot.

(TI): Oh my gosh.

(SR): So, that just kind of changed the trajectory of it. And it's- it's been, uh, a good thing for us in a lot of ways. It's never- you know, there's thousands of people that go through there every day, but we get like the same hundred, hundred and fifty customers a day.

(TI): Sure.

(SR): And we tried everything, couldn't figure it out. But that was kind of the next incremental jump, right? We went from farmer's markets and a few wholesalers to this thing. And then, uhm, our goal for- for the first year of operation was, you know, a thousand pounds of coffee. I said, man, if I can do a thousand pounds of coffee, that'll be awesome. And we ended up doing 15,000 pounds the first 12 months.

(TI): Wow. First 12 months in business?

(SR): Yeah. Uh—

(TI): That's amazing.

(SR): And then last year, uh, so 2018, we did right around 40,000 pounds.

(TI): 40,000?

(SR): Yeah.

(TI): Now, so, you wholesale- you also lease, correct? Like lease the beans to- to other brands?

(SR): Yeah, so we, uhm, we do a couple different things. So the, uh, the four revenue streams that I talk about is, we have the VRE, uhm, we have what I call retail, which is our website, you know, uncle Mary and aunt Tom that, you know, walk in and buy whatever. And then we have the farmer's markets and events, which is really kind of the- it's sort of retail but it's a lot more like, labor intensive, than just, you know, a mail order.

(TI): Sure.

(SR): And then the wholesale stuff. And the wholesale stuff is about 60 percent of the total, I would say. We have, uhm, couple hundred wholesalers in New York, down to the southern part of Virginia, all the way out to Texas.

(TI): And that's- is that under the Ricks Roasters name? Or is that under different names?

- (SR): Yeah, that's all Ricks Roasters brand.
- (TI): Oh, wow. That's—
- (SR): Really the- the vision, if you will, was to replicate the staff and operations. So, it's a small business. It's tied into the local community. And, the idea was to replicate that over and over so that at some point, Ricks Roasters would be selling the green coffee in the bags, and all the labels and raw product to all these licenses. So, at this point, we have, uhm, West Virginia, which is- which is really a customer sale. They're not a licensee. They're using our equipment. But they were kind of the pilot for this idea. So, every- all the coffee that is delivered to customers in West Virginia is roasted in West Virginia. Uhm, and then we have one in Charlottesville called Two Labs Coffee, and they started last summer. So, they bought a roaster, they bought the equipment, and they roast our coffees and some of theirs, but under our license, and they buy the raw product from us.
- (TI): So, they're buying the raw beans and then just roasting themselves—
- (SR): Right. They're buying the green coffee, yeah. And then, uh, we have one that's technically out of Roanoke, Texas, uhm, but one of the partners is local its four West Point grads, and, uh, they're- their company's called Brass Bullets Coffee. So, Eric, the guy that's local, has been roasting for us and working for us, and then also, you know, producing for them, and they have stuff all over the country. They're doing all kinds of crazy stuff with it.
- (TI): Wow, wow. So, in May 2013, you started your business while you were still at the Pentagon. Were you still in the military at that time?
- (SR): Yeah, so, uhm, yeah, I've been active duty- actually, was medically retired last May. So, I've been active duty for most of it.
- (TI): Oh my gosh.
- (SR): You know, the Navy, with its sense of humor. So we started May of 2013 and I was in my detailing window in October of 2013, and the business was going so strong that at that point, we said, okay, you know, one of us needs to be running the business full time. So, the- the plan, I say again, was that, uhm, if I was gonna get orders local, then I would stay active duty, Keely would quit her job, and she would run the business.
- (TI): Got you.

(SR): So, I got verbal's to, uhm, NCIS Quantico. I'm like, it's perfect.

(TI): Yeah.

(SR): Well, since I never actually executed the exact orders I was ever given verbal, these are the same. So, June of '14 rolls around. I'm like, hey, where's my hard copy orders? And they're like, well, there's a little problem. They're like, we really need you to go to Afghanistan.

(TI): [Laughter] That's a big difference from Quantico.

(SR): Yeah. They're like, good news is, you don't have to move your family because you can do all your training from DC and, but you know, four years orders, and you have to deploy twice. So, I actually, from July of '14 really until June of '15 I was either training or deployed so I wasn't even around.

(TI): So, you were- you were making this happen while you were deployed.

(SR): Yeah, yeah. You know, we've always had like an operations person sort of there running it. Once we went- we moved into a warehouse in July of 2014. Uhm, and, you know, we- we had somebody operationally there. So, I- I got medevacc'd out of Afghanistan in 2015, so then I just—

(TI): Oh my gosh.

(SR): The- yeah, I ended up having brain surgery and a bunch of other stuff, so I've been kind of hit or miss the last three years of it. But, yeah, we did, like I said, 40,000 pounds, almost half a million dollars in sales last year.

(TI): It obviously hasn't stopped you, whatever happened in- was it Afghanis- you- got airlifted out of Afghanistan?

(SR): Yeah, Afghanistan.

(TI): That obviously has not stopped you.

(SR): Uh, no, no.

(TI): What- what was you behind joining the military- what was the reason you joined the military?

(SR): So, uhm, and- and actually my military timeline's kind of a funny, too. So, uh, you know, I am of the Top Gun age, right? So, I wanted to fly jets for the Navy.

(TI): Oh, yeah?

(SR): So, I got accepted in the Merchant Marine Academy, went there, and, uhm, by the time it came around in my senior year, when it was time to, you know, apply for flight school and all that stuff, I really, I loved being a Merchant Marine engineer. I loved being CEO of the whole thing. I was like, you know, I came here to fly, I need to apply just because I'll always wonder what if? So, they would normally take ten pilots a year from our school, my year they took two and I was ranked number three.

(TI): Oh, man.

(SR): I was like, well got my message quick, like so I'm not supposed to fly. So, I ended up, uhm, sailing on my license for a couple years after graduation. And, you know, I was in the reserves for some of that, and then I took a civilian job in Singapore. So, I didn't do anything military, really, from 1994 to 2003. Uhm, came back in as a reservist, and then on active duty.

(TI): Oh, so you- you got some serious broken time there.

(SR): Yeah, like nine years.

(TI): You- you took a civilian job in Singapore. What- what was the civilian job?

(SR): So, I, uhm, I was running a marine pipe valve and fitting company.

(TI): Got you.

(SR): You know, selling to shipyards and ships. You know, the whole- the whole thing.

(TI): So, still naval in nature.

(SR): Yeah, still maritime related, yeah.

(TI): Got you.

(SR): So, and I worked for those guys, and that's kind of where I got this sort of desire for, you know, passion for the business side of things was, you know, I was a 24-year old kid. They moved me over there and said, alright, figure out what to do. So, it was awesome, it was awesome. So, I was there for three and a half years and then moved from there to San Diego with that company and ran San Diego for a couple years and then went from there to Alabama and ran that for a couple years.

(TI): And then you joined the Navy?

(SR): Then I came back into the Navy, yeah.

(TI): Got you.

(SR): 'Cause where—

(TI): W- go ahead.

(SR): Your commission as a reserve naval officer upon graduation, so I had a commission in '91.

(TI): Okay. And they gave you the option to come back at any point?

(SR): So, you know, that's kind of funny. When I started to come back in, I was like, oh, I'm just an IRR, I'll just go from IRR to SELRES and it'll be great. And they're like, hey dude, you haven't done anything in ten years, so we discharged all you clowns. Uhm, so, 'cause there was a lot of, you know, us Merch Marine guys that had our five- five or six year plan and then had just not really done anything.

(TI): Yeah.

(SR): So, from 2000, they went through and just discharged a bunch of us. So, I had to get undischarged and then I came back in as a reservist and, uhm, I didn't have a costar license anymore. They said, well, you can't be a Merch Marine guy, so you gotta be something else. I'm like, alright, what else can I be? They said oh, you can be a general [inaudible] so I was a general [inaudible]. But what they didn't tell me was that was going away, and that two years later, I was gonna have to be something else again. So, they said, uh, okay, yeah, you gotta be something else now. And I'm like, alright, what can I be? And I happened to run in to a classmate of mine, he was like, "Hey, I'm doing this intel thing it's pretty cool." I'm like, yeah, I'll do that. So, I converted to intel in 2006, and then I- my whole active duty time, I was an intel officer. Uhm—

(TI): Got you, got you.

(SR): Yeah.

(TI): Who was your best friend or greatest mentor while you were in?

(SR): Oh, man. Uhm. I had different people for different things, I guess you could say.

(TI): Sure.

(SR): So, my buddy Dave Harris is the one that, you know, when God puts people in your path at certain times for certain reasons, and Dave was a

good buddy of mine at school. And, I just happened to run into him in the clinic in Norfolk.

(TI): Like recently?

(SR): No, when I needed to change designators.

(TI): Oh, okay.

(SR): Like I had literally just heard, "Hey, you gotta be something else." Run into him and he's like hey you can do this intel thing. I was like, yeah. So, that was pretty pivotal. Uhm—

(TI): Got you.

(SR): And then there, uh, I had a boss on the carrier, Skid Markley was his name. Skid was his callsign. John Markley. Uhm, and he really kind of came in and sort of helped me through the transition of, okay, are you gonna do this forever and ever or not?

(TI): Oh, he helped you like say, you know, basically, if you have other goals, go get other goals, or—

(SR): So, because I- I went from a reservist to a permanently recalled active duty person—

(TI): Okay.

(SR): And my record just looked goofy. You know, I- well I'd been gone nine years, right? So, all the time that, uhm, other intel officers are out doing their JO tours and all those things, I wasn't anywhere.

(TI): Yeah. You were a completely different MOS. It was like you were—

(SR): Yeah, so I came in on active duty as a lieutenant commander, and—

(TI): Wow.

(SR): You know, I think three years after that, or something like that, is when I was in zone for O5. So, it was a really, uhm, bizarre sort of thing for a promotion board to see. So, I didn't get picked up O5 for the first round. And, you know, your chances go from 80 percent to like 3 after that.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SR): And that all kind of happened when Skid was my boss on the carrier. He said, look, you know, it's- you know. You can keep continuing. You can do

your whole career like this. So, had I made it to 20 instead of getting medically retired, I would have been a lieutenant commander for 19 years and 10 months, which would have to be a record somewhere [Laughter].

(TI): No kidding. That's- I didn't know that was even possible.

(SR): Yeah. They- they, uh- once you make 04 in the Navy, you can stay in as long as they keep continuing it. So, your name goes before the board every year, and every three years, they have to decide to continue you or let you go.

(TI): Wow. Uh, so, you know, with that being said, what is one thing from your service- uh, what's one thing from your service that you learned, that you apply today.

(SR): You know maybe this is kind of Navy specific, I guess, or at least my experience, has been Navy specific—

(TI): That's perfectly fine.

(SR): Uhm, you know, we're- when you're in the Navy, you're out there in the middle of nowhere, right? You are what you have. So, if you don't have it on the ship, you don't have it.

(TI): You ain't got it [Laughter]

(SR): Right, you ain't got it, right? It leads us, culturally, to be very creative and, uhm, outside of the box, sort of self-sufficient. And, I take it to this train where I don't even see a box. So, you know, to me, there's no problem that can't be solved or overcome or run around or run over. Uhm, and- and I think I learned a lot of that from being in a situation where you had to figure it out, right? You don't- you can't wait 'til the next day and have something flown in. You know, whatever- you know what I mean? And it's—

(TI): Yeah.

(SR): Having deployed with- you know, I deployed with the Army, I deployed the Marines, Air Force, everybody. That's a really unique Navy skillset, I feel like.

(TI): Figuring out how to be self-reliant.

- (SR): Yeah, because, you know, the analogy I always use is, if- the Army in particular, you know, if the Army wants to turn 5,000 people left, right?
- (TI): Yeah.
- (SR): There's a tremendous amount of instruction, training, da da da da, that makes 5,000 people go left. If the Navy wants to turn 5,000 people left, somebody with their one finger turns the ship's wheel.
- (TI): Mm.
- (SR): Uhm, so the- the culture of other services is very much this- do what we say you need to do when you need to do it, how you need to do it, and don't take a next step, don't go to a third step, because if you do, you're gonna run into somebody else that's doing their thing. There's nothing wrong with that. It's just the way it needs to be.
- (TI): That makes sense, that totally makes sense.
- (SR): In the business I'm running now, you know, to me, there's nothing that can't be solved somehow. You just have to figure out the way, right?
- (TI): Got you. It's good advice. Uh, do you have any other advice for veteran entrepreneurs that are looking to get into a business?
- (SR): I think, don't wait. Uhm, you know, if you have a passion, if you have something that- that really moves you or you feel called to do, don't wait for the right time, because there's never a right time. Uhm—
- (TI): Got you.
- (SR): If you keep waiting for that right time, you'll never get it. Uhm, and just understand that, you know, if everything's perfect, there's still gonna be days you hate it. You know, you're gonna look yourself in the mirror and go, I'm insane. Why did I do this? Uhm, I actually, uh, taught a, uhm, entrepreneurship class for Mary Washington's MBA program for a semester. And, the first thing I said, I said, look. For those of you that are in here because you want to start your own business, it- it guarantees the fact that you're insane. Because you have to be. You have to be a little bit crazy.
- (TI): Why is that?
- (SR): Uhm, you know, it- it, you don't realize how all-consuming it is. I mean, it- it's your life. It's your entire financial life. It's everything. Uhm, regardless

of, you know, what you do or how you do it or how big you are, or how small you are, it is – it becomes your life.

(TI): Working towards getting your business off the ground, uh, when you first started or even today. Uh, what- like what is a work week like? Like how many hours or- how much time did you spend getting your business started?

(SR): So, when we started, so, Keely and I, you know, had fulltime jobs, of course, right? So, we would get up at like 5 in the morning. We would start roasting coffee like while we were getting showers and eating breakfast and that sort of thing, and then we would go to work, and then we'd come home and as soon as we came home, we'd start roasting again and packaging coffee and we'd work 'til about midnight, one o'clock every day.

(TI): Oh my god. That does sound insane.

(SR): It- it's nuts. It is nuts. Uhm, but, you know, it's been the most rewarding thing, as well. Because it's yours. You know, it's your baby and you can use it to bless people the way you have, and we've blessed a lot of people along the way.

(TI): In what ways? You partner with some non-profits or?

(SR): So, we do that. Uhm, you know, so, financially we have helped non-profits and- and some veteran's charities. Uhm, but even like, you know, our first year, around the holidays, we just didn't have enough people it was just she and I and we kind of leaned on people wherever we could. So, we had this lady that was a single mom and she had four little kids, or four kids from like 14 down to six or seven or something like that. And we got them to package some of our coffee, so we would deliver all the bags and the labels and whatever and they would just package these little bags of coffee. And, we gave 'em like 25 cents a bag, and they saved the money and went on the first vacation they'd ever been on.

(TI): Oh, wow. So, you've worked with a lot of non-profits, you've worked with a lot of veterans in the community. What's one veteran or non-profit in the veteran space that you're excited about?

(SR): So, one of our biggest charities thus far, this place called Camp Valor Outdoors.

(TI): Mm.

(SR): So, they're officially out of Missouri. That's where their camp is. But they have people all around the country, and what they help veterans do is sort of get back into the shooting sports and fishing and hunting, get outdoors where, uhm, you know, they- a lot of times, they, you know, I can speak for myself in this case, too. Uhm, after you've had, you know, a traumatic injury or illness, uhm, you tend to write off everything that was gonna be you for the future. Uhm, instead of realizing what you can still do, what consumes you is what you can't do anymore. This organization helps reinforce what they still can do. Uhm—

(TI): That's great. It's called- what's it- Camp Valor?

(SR): Camp Valor Outdoors, yeah. So—

(TI): Got you.

(SR): We have a couple coffees on our website that when you buy one of the coffees, uh, portion of the proceeds goes back to them.

(TI): That's great. That's great. Uh, at the end of the interview, please send me links in an email.

(SR): Sure.

(TI): And I'll make sure- I'll make sure that those go in the show notes. So, what's next for Ricks Roasters? What's the next grand scheme? You did 40,000 pounds of coffee this year. What's next for the company?

(SR): Yeah. Uhm, so the- so kind of the big thing that we had last year was we had a contract out of a company called Concessions International. And they operate seven different brands at Reagan and Dulles. So, starting January of 2018, we were in Reagan and Dulles, you can drink our coffee in seven different places. Uhm, and, you know they're- they're expected to take us nationwide at some point. Uhm, so that could be a- a pretty tremendous- you know, they were- I want to say about 25 percent of our sales or something last year. It was pretty significant.

(TI): It was a good boost up to partner with them?

(SR): It was a good boost, yeah. Uhm, so that could be, uhm, you know, I'm moving- me and my family are moving down to Florida, so we're gonna open something up in Florida and, uh, if everything goes as planned, I think the Brass Bullet guys are gonna end up buying the Virginia operation and continuing on as Rick Roasters and Brass Bullet and run the Virginia facilities.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SR): Expand to Florida.

(TI): So, you're- you're moving the headquarters down- down to Florida.

(SR): Moving to Florida, yep.

(TI): Got you. Uh, where- if I'm in Texas, if I'm in Colorado. Where- where can I find you, your product, how can I follow what's going on with the business?

(SR): Uhm, you know, the best way is the website, and our social media. Uhm, on the website we have all the locations, and one of the-

(TI): What's the- what's the name of the website? Is it ricksroasters.com?

(SR): ricksroasters.com, yeah. [Link: <https://www.ricksroasters.com/>]

(TI): Got you.

(SR): And, one of the cool things that we do is, you- you can elect to pick up your product at any of our wholesalers. So, you can order online, and go, hey, that place is close to me, I'll just pick it up there. You don't pay any shipping, uhm, and then it gets, you know, it gets the customer to walk into one of our wholesalers.

(TI): Okay, that's a neat little program.

(SR): Yeah. It's- it's a neat function. A lot of people use it. You know, especially, we do farmer's markets all summer long, but then when they end, people that are used to buying every week at the farmer's market, you know, they don't have it shipped, they don't want to come down to the roastery, so they'll just go, hey, listen this is near me, I'll just have it dropped off there and I'll go pick it up.

(TI): Very cool. Well, Sean, not Rick, because I've called you- I've probably called you Rick at least twice in this interview, is there anything that I missed or haven't asked that you think it's important to share?

(SR): You know, I think the biggest thing, you know, and this- this show targets veterans, right?

(TI): Absolutely.

(SR): And that's, uhm, you know, I was on the Navy's Wounded Warrior team in 2017, and going to the Warrior Games in Chicago, so Navy actually

hosted 'em in 2017, so they were in Chicago. That experience alone was enough to kind of help you, help me, uh, regain some hope, I guess. You could see people, there was a guy, this guy's a Marine, he had one arm, a piece of another arm, and he was above the knee amputee on both his legs. And I watched that guy swim a hundred freestyle, probably faster than I was doing it.

(TI): Oh my gosh.

(SR): Unbelievable. Uhm, you know, the life that you leave behind, whether you retire, whether you medically retire, whether you just separate. Uhm, you can still do a lot. You can still have a very full, rewarding life. Uhm, and the worst thing that any of us can do is to start feeling sorry for ourselves. You know, if you're out there and you feel like now that your military career is coming to an end in whatever fashion it is, that kind of that's the end. Don't think that. There's still so many wonderful things you can do, and so much that can make your life very rewarding.

(TI): Absolutely. The- you know, I tell people all the time. Uh, the uniform- don't let the uniform define you. You know, have it be a part of you, but you were- you had a first name before you started, and a last name before you started, and you got a first and last name as- at the end of your service. Don't let it define you, that's- that's a good thing to take away there, Sean.

(SR): Even if people call you by your last name [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

[00:37:26] Music

[00:37:33] PSA:

Narrator: It's time we all thought differently about homeless veterans.

Man 1: I never thought of myself as a veteran, even though I served in the military.

Narrator: Because, when we know who our veterans are-

Man 2: I never thought if I lost my job, I might lose my home.

Narrator: Understand how easily anyone can become homeless.

Woman 1: I never thought my VA benefits could be the answer.

Narrator: And realize that VA is here to help. We can end veteran homelessness. If you know of, or are a veteran in need, contact the nearest VA medical center at [va.gov/homeless](https://www.va.gov/homeless/) [Link: <https://www.va.gov/homeless/>] or 877-424-3838

[00:38:02] Music

[00:38:09] Closing Monologue:

(TI): A big thank you to Sean for coming on and sharing his story. Ricks Roasters is some pretty amazing coffee, and we look forward to what's in store as he expands his headquarters down to Florida. To follow what Ricks Roasters is up to, or to order a bag yourself, you can find him at [ricksroasters.com](https://www.ricksroasters.com) [Link: <https://www.ricksroasters.com>]. On the website, you can also find and follow all of his social media. And you can find us on social media. On Twitter [Link to VA's twitter page: https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca], , Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>], YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLmbzjtpX-Htstp2vw>], Instagram [Link to VA's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>]. Either at the US Department of Veterans Affairs or Deptvetaffairs. You can always find us with that blue checkmark next to our name. And if you want to contact the show directly, you can find us at podcast@va.gov This is Wrestlemania week, and this week's Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week is a wrestler that's getting inducted into WWE Hall of Fame. Brian Gerard James is a second-generation wrestler and is the son of WWE hall of famer Bullet Bob Armstrong. Like his father, James is a Marine Corps veteran, and he served from 1987 to 1993 and was a Platoon Sergeant during Operation Desert Storm. After his service, James joined the WWE as the roadie to JJ Jjeff Jarrett. He shortly transitioned into the Rogue Dog Jesse James, partnering with Badass Billy Gun to form the new age outlaws. The new age outlaws were cornerstones of WWE's D generation X stable and the WWE attitude era in general. Winning the tag team championships five times. Additionally, Rogue Dog went on to become an intercontinental and hardcore champion. This week, the entire D

generation X will be inducted into the WWE hall of fame. So, congratulations to the Rogue Dog, and thank you for your service.

That's it for this week's episode. As always, follow us on social media, give us a like, give us a share. Email the show at podcast@va.gov and you can read a lot of great stories about veterans on blogs.va.gov [Link: www.blogs.va.gov]. Thanks again for listening and see you next week.

[00:40:16] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)